



**DECLAN GANE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION LOGISTICS ASSOCIATES (IELA), DISCUSSES THE DELICACIES OF EVENT LOGISTICS**

**E**vent logistics, or perhaps a more familiar term that our more mature readers will remember, freight forwarding, is probably the most misunderstood and least recognised part of the complex jigsaw that combines to stage exhibitions and events of all types. To most people, it is simply the transport and moving of goods, and if all goes well, no one hears anything more and cares even less. However, scratch the surface of this highly demanding sector and you will find a relatively small group of high-quality, highly specialised international logistics providers without whose services the show simply would not "go on".

Phil Powell, managing director of CEVA Showfreight, is one of these expert professionals. He also happens to be one of the seven founders and current chairman

of IELA (International Exhibition Logistics Associates). "The business has changed significantly over the 35 years that I have been in the industry and developments in the last 10 years have had the most impact. Consumers now have an extremely high expectation of brand experience and this means that the size, shape and technical requirements of most of the products we ship for global brands are increasingly complex. This has had a direct result in the increasingly personalised service that we now have to offer our customers. No longer is it a 'one size fits all' package, but rather a bespoke offering crafted around the shipping requirements, size, sophistication and destinations selected by the customer."

KB event director, Lynne McPherson agrees with Powell explaining that it is simply no longer commercially viable to provide just transportation for clients. Her company, she says, "offers a complete 360 degree package". This includes everything from the moving of equipment by road, sea and air; arranging documentation and ensuring that drivers are hands-on and readily available on the ground - something that really does distinguish the event professionals from the rest. McPherson gives an example. "Last year, we were contracted

to organise and manage the freighting requirements for an event in the Indian Ocean. The scale of the production took four months of planning, several visits to the island beforehand and a crew of 100 technicians to ensure success. The lighting and sound equipment was flown from East Midlands Airport with the set and rigging sent by sea. Plant came from Singapore and much of the set dressing from India. As a logistical operation it was huge and it illustrates perfectly how the industry has changed and what clients expect these days; they really do demand the full solutions package and today distance is no obstacle."

#### Quality control

"These days, show organisers require their logistics provider to be their partners," says Agility Fairs & Events' sales and marketing manager, Garcia Newell. He continues. "In days of old, the freight or lifting contractor was considered the lowest of the low, even though they played, what was in my view, one of the most important roles within the show operation. Organisers nowadays recognise that without our assistance, they would have unhappy exhibitors. Many event organisers are now interested in contractors which develop services and systems that assist exhibitors and make the whole logistical operation as smooth as possible."

Powell concurs. "CEVA has developed quality standards and systems which accommodate all our customers' requirements - ensuring accuracy and speed at every level such as Showmate, our online management system that monitors ►



Phil Powell  
of CEVA  
Showfreight



the exact movement of every shipment from dispatch to delivery." He gives the example of the company's service for Lockheed Martin, a key player in the development of the F35 Joint Strike Fighter aircraft. "CEVA had to ship a full scale replica of the F35 around Europe, together with highly sophisticated cockpit simulators. Due to the size and weight of this particular shipment, we had to locate highly specialised equipment to move the equipment into a series of seven European countries. In addition, specialised lifting and loading machinery had to be co-ordinated to be ready at every stop of the tour to ensure safe and competent set-up. Naturally the customs clearance, road transportation and security parts of the bespoke service all had to dovetail into a seamless operation."

#### Global reach

Event logistics providers are at the cutting edge of use of new technology, according to Newell, with extensive use of web and information technology. "In the old days, being out of the office at a show meant days going without email, now you have to have a laptop, preferably with Wi-Fi, your GSM mobile and a digital camera too. Many agents will now send photos of clients' shipments being delivered to their stands in real-time, just as they are delivered, a real comfort to many exhibitors."

Another development that KB Event has been quick to pick up on, is clients' increasing desire to see how their supplies are seeking to reduce environmental impact, according to McPherson. Many clients today want to see "green credentials", which for her company



is not a problem, as she says KB Event became the first UK-based transport company to successfully register to the Acorn Environmental Standard BS8655. "Today's reality is really something entirely different from the diesel guzzling, portable building stereotype of this industry. Transport companies have some of the best control and management procedures in place, simply because their operator licenses depend upon it. In achieving our BS8655, we are not only confirming our commitment to protect the environment but also hoping to change a misconception about our industry sector."

Finally Powell concludes with his view on how the industry is changing, as popular destinations of the past like Las Vegas, Singapore and Dubai are now shifting to Romania, Barcelona, Nigeria and Libya among others. "Our business is at the forefront of the continued globalisation that has become a defining factor of the

21st century. Indeed CEVA and other elite professionals under the IELA brand of quality are instrumental in this process for many of the big global brands."

So as one might expect marketing director's objectives, the 21st century will deliver experiential events in greater and greater numbers, big and small, which means more shipments and more opportunities to "get the gear to the right place at the right time". With a growing market there will be new challenges and competitors, but it will be the smart companies that adapt and develop, listen to clients' requirements and harness technology to deliver efficiencies that will do well. IELA celebrates its 20th anniversary in 2009 and has grown from seven founding members, to a global elite of 110 expert event logistic providers in 44 countries. Entry levels are high, but more companies are expected to make the grade, driven by the sophisticated 21st century consumer. ■

#### Stand Out takes five with John Burrows, sales director of Production Freight

##### What recent international event that you handled was your biggest challenge?

Each job offers its own unique challenge and it's not always the large shipments that give you the biggest problems. We have recently moved a London Bus to Beijing and back for the Olympic closing ceremony, which posed us lots of questions. Firstly, there was getting a vessel to match the time frame we had to work within and once we had done this there was the matter of being able to load the bus onto the vessel in the UK. Because the bus was not a real bus we were not able to raise the front end sufficiently in order to get the unit up the ships ramp. Then there were lengthy negotiations with different Chinese authorities whereby we had to convince them that the bus was not in fact a bus but a mobile display unit. This we had to do otherwise we would have had to import it as a motor vehicle, which would have meant a lengthy import procedure that would have taken so long we would have

missed the event. Anyhow all the issues were overcome and everything went well but it did take at least seven months planning.

If you had one good piece of advice to offer your clients planning a future overseas event, what would it be?

The smart people contact their freight forwarders early in their planning process. Also make sure you choose a freight agent that has experience in live event shipping. Give them as much information as possible, as good communication in the early stages can save everyone time, money and stress in the long run. Shipping around the world is nothing like as easy as the big red swoosh you see on the TV adverts whereby things are miraculously transported across the globe to their destination. There are so many links in the chain that have to be secure in order for a shipment to succeed and each one of those links has a potential hazard attached to it. Early and open communication is key.

With the recent decrease in oil prices and the general cost of shipping, do you feel this

will filter through to your clients who have overseas events?

Exporters around the world have had a hard time in the last 12 months with the global increase in fuel and everyone has felt the impact of this in one way or another. However, we have recently seen fuel surcharges being reduced by the ocean carriers and airlines and obviously when these happen we are more than pleased to pass these reductions onto clients. Anything that saves them money and allows them to be more competitive can only be good for us too.

##### How do you see future trends for shipping live events worldwide?

I see the future as being healthy. It's clear that we are either heading towards or are already in the grip of a recession. Even during the worst of times there will always be live events. Be it theatrical or musical shows, sports events or companies needing to exhibit or promote their goods to maintain their market share. I'm not saying that the live event industry is bullet proof and I'm sure there will be casualties but I am confident about the future.